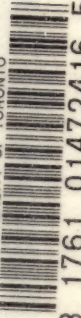


UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO



3 1761 01472416 5

Caird, Edward
Idealism and the theory of
knowledge

BD
161
C35

[From the Proceedings of the British Academy, Vol. I]

IDEALISM AND
THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

By Dr. Edward Caird

91847
—
1619108.


London

Published for the British Academy

By Henry Frowde, Oxford University Press Warehouse
Amen Corner, E.C.

Price One Shilling net

BD
161
C35



Idealism
The philosophy of

IDEALISM AND THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE

BY DR. EDWARD CAIRD

Delivered May 14, 1903.

SINCE the publication of Kant's great work, almost all discussion of the theory of knowledge has turned upon the relation of the object to the subject or of the content of our experience to the formal character of our thinking. In some sense, therefore, we may call all modern theories of knowledge idealistic, and most of them have been so called by their authors. But this does not carry us very far: for the word idealism has been used with so many shades of meaning that it is loaded with misleading associations. It has even, it may be feared, led to the confusion with each other of philosophies which have almost nothing in common. It becomes, therefore, a matter of some importance to disentangle the various senses in which the term has been employed, and the attempt to do so may perhaps furnish the best starting-point for a consideration of the real issues involved in the question.

Now with Plato, who first brought the word into philosophical use, an idea meant something that was primarily and emphatically objective. The idea of a thing was, as he constantly puts it, the thing itself. 'The good itself,' 'the beautiful itself,' 'the one itself,' are the permanent objective realities to which all our conceptions of goodness, beauty and unity point, as distinguished from their phenomenal appearance; and the thought that they are present to our minds, or accessible to our consciousness, though never absent, is secondary and derivative. But with Locke an idea is primarily a state of mind, and Berkeley's doctrine that the *esse* of things is their *percipi* has so deeply affected our philosophical language that in common usage the name idealism is most often applied to the theory which regards the modifications of our consciousness as the objects, or at least as the primary and immediate objects, of knowledge, and which treats the existence of the external world only as an

inference. This usage would not in itself be a matter for regret, but, as I have already suggested, it has not seldom led to a misconception of the meaning of philosophical writers who employ the word with something of its old Platonic significance.

Such a misconception is partly favoured by the way in which the so-called idealism of Germany has developed. Kant emphasized the relativity of objects to the unity of the self, but he still maintained the reservation that the objects so related are not in an ultimate sense real, apart from the subjectivity to which they are revealed. While, therefore, he contended that the world of experience cannot be regarded as independent of consciousness in general, and, indeed, of the consciousness of man, he still held to the distinction of the objects of experience from things in themselves. He thus, after all, seemed to seclude man in a world of his own consciousness, and to sever him entirely from reality. Hence when Kant was attacked as a Berkeleian, it gave him no little trouble to separate his own doctrine from that of Berkeley, and his attempts to work out this distinction are perhaps the obscurest parts of the *Critique of Pure Reason*. In fact, he was unable to achieve this result except by an argument which—if carried to all its consequences—would have been fatal to the distinction of phenomena from things in themselves, and would thus have transformed the most fundamental conceptions of the *Critique*. For the point of that argument is that we can be conscious of the subject only in distinction from, and in relation to, the object, and that, therefore, our consciousness of the external world is as *immediate* as our consciousness of the self, and our consciousness of the self as *mediate* as our consciousness of the external world. But if this argument be valid, the subjective point of view of Berkeley can once for all be set aside. To suppose that we are first conscious of our ideas, as our ideas, and then that secondly we proceed to infer from them the existence of objects, is to invert the order of our intellectual life, and to tear asunder its constituent elements. It is to invert its order: for, though the unity of the self may be implied in all consciousness of objects, yet it is to the object in the first instance that our attention is directed, and we observe the outward world and construe its meaning long before we turn the eye of reflexion upon the inner life. And it is to tear the elements of it asunder: for the outer and the inner life are at every point in close correlation, and there is no experience of ours, theoretical or practical, in which we have not to do with both. The growth of our inner life is just the development of our knowledge of the outer world and of our interests in it, and the attempt to retire

into ourselves and in a literal sense to make our mind a 'kingdom' to itself is suicidal. It would be like the attempt of the abstract pleasure-seeker to get pleasure apart from all interest in anything but pleasure itself.

[Berkeleyanism, if we neglect the somewhat artificial expedients by means of which Berkeley tried to find his way back to an objective world or at least to an objective deity, may easily be pushed into the abyss of Solipsism.] And, perhaps, there may still be some one who, taking the doctrine in this sense, would repeat the paradoxical assertion of Hume that Berkeley's argument 'cannot be refuted,' though it 'carries no conviction.' In truth, it is so far from being incapable of refutation, that in its very statement it refutes itself, by setting up an '*ipse*' or self with no not-self as its correlate, and indeed, by assuming the possibility of the existence of a finite individual, who is conscious of himself in his individuality, and yet is not, *ipso facto*, aware of his relation to any greater whole in which he is a part.] In like manner, in the similar but more developed doctrine of Leibniz the monads 'have no windows,' or, perhaps we might say irreverently, no front-windows, through which they may come into real relations with objects; but the result is that they have to be conceived as under continual illumination by a God, who gives them the apparent experience of a world of which directly they could know nothing. They are isolated from reality in a phantom universe of their own, a sort of spiritual theatre set up in their own souls; but care is taken that the great drama of existence shall be re-enacted on this private stage. Berkeley, in the end, had accepted nearly the same modified form of Subjectivism, dismissing, what on this theory was superfluous¹, the reality of any world but a world of spirits and their conscious states. And in this shape, which is supposed to derive some support from Kant, the doctrine seems still to be accepted by some writers, as the genuine result of idealism, and it has been both attacked and defended on this basis. For, while there are those who find in such a doctrine a *reductio ad absurdum* of all idealism, there are others to whom, as to Berkeley, it seems a valuable safeguard against materialism, and a fundamental element in any spiritualistic theory of the world. Fearing the abyss of *Solipsism*, and reading in a onesided way the truth that all objects as such are relative to the subject, such writers would compromise with the enemy, and abandon to him all parts of the universe in which they cannot find thought and will, or at least some form of consciousness; and they would

¹ Leibniz also conceives all the monads as in a sense spiritual unities each having a perception of the whole.

declare in this sense that 'all reality is spirit,' that is, that reality consists solely of conscious beings and their states of consciousness. But I am afraid that the enemy will not be propitiated even by this sacrifice, and that the denial of the reality of the material world will inevitably lead to the denial of the reality of any world at all.]

With such subjectivism the German idealism had no necessary connexion, at least after Fichte had removed the last fragment of it from his philosophy. The result of Kant's teaching, when it was freed from the contradictory notion of the 'thing in itself'—that Irish Bull in philosophy, as Heine calls it—was not to cast any, even the slightest, doubt on the reality of the external world, but only to show that a new element must be added to all that we know of it as an external world, namely, its relation to the subject. No doubt, this new element brings important modifications into our previous views of objectivity. For, on the one hand, it absolutely precludes the attempt to explain the spiritual by the material, and, indeed, compels us to conclude that there is no material world which is not also spiritual. And, on the other hand, as the correlation between the self and the not-self is not onesided, it brings with it also the conviction that there is no spiritual world which is not also material, or does not presuppose a material world. Thus the reality of that which is other than the self-conscious intelligence is seen to rest on the same basis with that of the self-conscious intelligence itself, and the one cannot be denied without the other¹.

But at this point a new difficulty has arisen. So soon as it is understood that the assertion that all objects are relative to the subject, involves the counter-assertion that the subject as such is relative to the object, we seem to be involved in an antinomy between two forms of consciousness, which can neither be reconciled nor separated. We seem, in fact, to be forced alternately to make the subject an adjective or property of the object, and the object an adjective or property of the subject; in other words, to set up two opposite theories, materialism and subjective idealism, each of which has its own independent value, and neither of which can be put aside in favour of the other. This balancing or dualistic view is substantially the theory adopted by Clifford and Huxley, and it has been fully worked out by Mr. Spencer. These writers, in short, use the double relativity of consciousness and self-consciousness, or

¹ There is, indeed, a sense in which all that is apprehended by the intelligence must have something of the nature of the intelligence in it. On this subject I may refer to what I have said elsewhere (*Evolution of Theology in the Greek Philosophers*, vol. i, p. 193 seq.).

of matter and mind, as the means of escaping both from the objections to materialism, and from the objections to subjective idealism: but what they set up in place of each of these theories is simply the assertion that, from a phenomenal point of view, they are both true, while from the point of view of reality, we cannot establish either of them. Thus there are two independent ways of looking at the world, each of which claims the whole field of existence for itself and is, therefore, absolutely opposed to the other. Each of them, indeed, has its usefulness for certain purposes of science, the one as a principle of physics, and the other as a principle of psychology, but neither can finally vindicate itself as the truth to the exclusion of the other. We are, therefore, in the presence of an immoveable difference which defies reconciliation; and the absolute reality which lies beyond these opposites, must for ever baffle our understanding, though, as Mr. Spencer holds, it is presupposed in the very nature of consciousness. Hence we may regard the world either as a connected system of motions in matter, or as a connected system of modes of consciousness, and from either of these hypotheses important scientific results may be derived: but we can neither decide for one of the alternatives to the exclusion of the other, nor can we rise to any higher point of view which would embrace them both. 'See then our predicament,' says Mr. Spencer, 'we can explain matter only in terms of mind: we can think of mind only in terms of matter. When we have pushed our explanation of the first to the farthest limit, we are referred back to the second for a final answer, and when we have got the final answer of the second, we are referred back to the first¹.'

There is a superficial plausibility in this view, but it is difficult to conceive one which is fundamentally more incoherent. It 'splits the world in two with a hatchet.' It breaks up consciousness into 'two consciousnesses,' which are somehow united, though there is no logical way from the one to the other: and it fails altogether to explain the actual combination of the two in our daily experience. For, just because Mr. Spencer makes the difference of mind and matter absolute, he can admit the unity only in the form of an abstract 'One' in which all difference is lost. At the beginning of his *First Principles*, he lays down the logical doctrine, that thought is essentially the limitation of an infinite or unconditioned being, a being of which we have only a 'dim consciousness,' as that which is presupposed in all definite apprehension either of the object or of the subject. But the unity thus presupposed is unknowable,

¹ *Principles of Psychology*, i, p. 627, § 272.

and that which we know is confined to the phenomenal. Thus each of Mr. Spencer's two conceptions, his conception of the phenomenal world with its insoluble difference, and his conception of the unknowable being which alone is real, seems to require the other as its compliment. [The abstraction of the unity leaves the duality of matter and mind without any connecting link, and the equally abstract duality of mind and matter cannot be reduced to unity except by the suppression of their distinctive characters. Hence the unity and the difference cannot be regarded as both real, and if, as with Mr. Spencer, the unity is treated as real, the duality must be regarded as merely phenomenal. All our science, therefore, deals merely with appearances, which we cannot bring into relation with reality. The impulse of reason to seek for unity cannot be set aside, but, under the conditions of Mr. Spencer's theory, it can be attained only by the sacrifice of knowledge itself.] The result is instructive as pointing to the fate of all theories that set the 'one' against the 'many.' Abstract Monism and abstract Pluralism are not, strictly speaking, two philosophies but different aspects of the same philosophy. Polytheism always ends in setting up a fate beyond the gods.

The Spencerian philosophy, however, is valuable as a protest against its opposite, against any 'too easy monism.' It is a legitimate criticism both upon subjective idealism and upon materialism, though it only puts one one-sided theory against another, and maintains that both have equal rights. If we could not do better, it might be well to compromise upon the Spinozistic idea of the parallelism of the two unrelated attributes of extension and thought, or, upon Schelling's conception of the balanced equality of the real and ideal factors of the universe, even though the result, as with Mr. Spencer, were to leave us without any unity which was more than a name.

We are not however, shut up to such a desperate course; for the main result of modern philosophy and especially of modern idealism has been to put a concrete, in place of an abstract unity, or, in other words, to vindicate the essential correlation of the self and the not-self. Idealism in this sense has nothing to object to the strongest assertion of the reality of the distinctions of matter and mind, or of any of the distinctions and oppositions that enter into the theoretical and practical consciousness of man. But it maintains that there are no *absolute* differences or antagonisms in the intelligible world, no distinctions which do not imply relations, and, therefore also, an ultimate unity between the things distinguished: and, of

course, it must refuse to admit that there is an unintelligible world, a world that cannot be brought in relation to the intelligence.

Here, however we must stop to meet a possible misunderstanding. There are many at present who are justly jealous of an easy monism, and some perhaps, who, less justly, carry their jealousy to the point of practically refusing to admit any ultimate unity at all. Hence, when it is stated to be an essential result of idealism that there is a unity beyond all difference and through all difference, they are apt to think that this involves the denial of the reality of the differences. Thus they seem to hold, as Spencer seems to hold, that we can distinguish without relating, or relate without admitting any unity within which the difference is embraced. And in this they get much support from the ordinary consciousness: for the 'plain man,' as he is called, prior to reflexion, is apt to alternate between unity and difference without bringing them together: he is ready, therefore, to take any distinction which he recognizes as absolute: and, on the other hand, if any doubt is thrown on the absoluteness of such a distinction, he is inclined to infer that it ought to be dismissed as altogether unreal. No one who has got beyond this naïve state of consciousness, will allow himself to be impaled on either horn of its unreal dilemma. But, if we have once renounced such abstract ways of thinking, I do not see how we can stop short of the result that the one and the many, so far from being opposed, are factors of thought which cannot be separated without contradiction. An absolute difference would be no difference at all; for it would annihilate all relation between the things distinguished, and, in doing so, it would annihilate itself. This is a principle of logic often illustrated by the fate of dualistic systems of thought, which in seeking to emphasize the reciprocal exclusiveness of two opposite principles, have ended by depriving them both of the very character in virtue of which they were opposed. Thus Manichaeism, when it took evil as absolute, as a reality quite separate from good, inevitably made it lose its character as evil; for it thus turned evil into an independent substance, which in itself had no opposition, because no relation, to good. We can have opposition only within a unity, and, if we try to stretch it farther, we overreach our object, and end by making the opposition itself impossible or meaningless. Any one, therefore, who thinks that a refusal to admit pure abstract contradiction between two terms—say, between truth and falsehood, or good and evil—involves the denial of all validity or reality to the distinction in question, must be reminded that relative opposition is the only real or conceivable opposition, and that distinctions are in effect

denied whenever they are made absolute. Thus those who carry any difference to the point of dualism do away with that very difference by over-emphasizing it, just as surely as those who disregard or abstract from difference in the interest of unity. The parts of the intelligible world mean nothing except in the whole, and the whole means nothing except as distributing itself to the parts, and constituting their spiritual bond¹.

✓ If there is any truth in these views, the only reasonable controversy between philosophers must be, on the one hand, as to the nature of the all-embracing unity on which every intelligible experience must rest, and, on the other hand, as to the nature of the differences which it equally involves. To ask whether there *is* any such real unity, or whether it embraces real differences, is to attempt to leap off one's own shadow: it is to try to think, while attacking the only basis on which we can think. We cannot play the game of thought, if one might use such an expression, without taking our stand upon the idea that the world is a self-consistent and intelligible whole: though of course, this does not mean that any actual attempt to systematize our knowledge can be more than a step towards the attainment of the ideal of a perfect analysis and re-synthesis of the manifold content of experience. The problem of knowledge is to find out how the real unity of the world manifests itself through all its equally real differences, and we can show that any abstract view, such as those of Berkeley or Spencer, which would deprive us of any element in it, would make the progressive solution of it by science and philosophy impossible. But we cannot prove these presuppositions of all knowledge directly, or by making the system based upon them complete, if for no other reason, because with our increasing experience the problem itself is always enlarging. In this sense, the work of science, and still more the work of philosophy, must always be a work of faith, meaning by faith, not believing anything merely upon authority, but proceeding upon a principle the complete vindication or realization of which is for us impossible; for, obviously, nothing short of omniscience could grasp the world as a complete system. It is involved in the very idea of a developing consciousness such as ours, that while, as an intelligence, it presupposes the idea of the whole, and, both in thought and action, must continually strive to realize that idea, yet what it deals with is necessarily a partial and limited experience, and its actual attainments can never, either in

¹ Dr. Ward, in his able Lectures on Naturalism and Agnosticism, admits frequently the correlation of subject and object; but he seems to me in effect to withdraw this admission, when he speaks of each individual consciousness as having a subject and object of its own.

theory or practice, be more than provisional. Aristotle¹ has expressed both sides of this ideal in one of his most comprehensive sayings, when he declares that 'as, in practice, it is our highest aim, starting with what *seems* good to us individually, to make what is absolutely good our individual aim, so in theory, we have to start with what seems true to us individually, but the object we seek is to make what is really and naturally intelligible or true, true or intelligible for ourselves.' In other words, we have to learn to look at the world, in ordine ad universum and not *in ordine ad individuum*, from its real centre and not from the centre of our own individual existence: and the task is not one which is forced upon us externally, but one which is laid upon us by the nature of the reason which is within us. Aristotle, therefore, holds that it is possible for us to make the universal point of view our own, as it is also possible for us to make the absolute good the end of our lives. But we have to add to what Aristotle says that this end is one which is ever *being* realized, and never is finally realized by us. It is a faith which is continually passing into knowledge, but never becomes complete knowledge.

If however in one sense we must call this idea a faith, we must remember that it is in no sense an arbitrary assumption: rather it is the essential faith of reason, the presupposition and basis of all that reason has achieved or can achieve. We may admit that, as Tennyson says, in this aspect of it our 'deepest faith' is also our 'ghastliest doubt'—the doubt whether the whole system of things to which we belong is not illusive and meaningless. But, apart from this inevitable shadow of our finitude, the real difficulties of knowledge and practice lie not in the idea or ideal of our intelligence, but rather in the application of it to the particulars of thought and life, in carrying out the effort to co-ordinate or affiliate the different appearances as elements of one reality, or, as Mr. Bradley would express it, to determine what is the 'degree of reality' that belongs to each of them, when brought in relation to all the rest, and to give it in our practical life the importance which really belongs to it. But to question whether the whole is an intelligible system, is as vain as to question whether any part of our experience, even the most transient and illusive of appearances, has a place in that system.

There is, indeed, a way of escaping from this view of reality as a systematic whole which has often been tried. This is to take our stand upon some particular principle or principles, or upon some particular fact or facts, as self-evidencing or immediately 'given' truth, on the fixed certitude of which we can build our further know-

¹ Met. 1029 b, 5 seq.

ledge. Mr. Andrew Lang in his book upon Myth and Ritual, tells us of a theological child, who described the creation of the world in the following terms: 'God first made a little place to stand upon, and then he made the rest.' So philosophers have often sought for some special criterion of truth, for some basal principle, like the *Cogito ergo sum* of Descartes, or for some *datum* or *data* of sense, as a foundation on which they might build their system. But the search is a vain one. For, when we examine any such principle we discover that it is only one aspect of things, which has no claim to be taken as prior to the other aspects of them, and which proves the others only in the same sense in which it is proved by them; and also that in being brought in relation to those other aspects, it is subject to re-interpretation. And, in like manner, when we examine any supposed *datum* of sense, we find that it is merely one appearance, which helps us to explain other appearances only as it is explained by them, and that its ultimate interpretation depends on the way in which it combines with all our previous consciousness of things. All that is certain about any such *datum*, in the first instance, is that it has an indubitable claim to be recognized as an element in the intelligible world; but how much truth there is in the first presentation of it we cannot tell, till we are able to think it together with the other elements of our experience. In other words, it must be interpreted so as to cohere with them, and they must be interpreted so as to cohere with it. But whether this will lead to its being explained, or to its being explained away, or, as is more likely, partly to the one and partly to the other, we cannot tell *a priori*. We cannot, therefore, take our stand on any one *datum* or principle taken by itself; for, taken by itself, it cannot be known for what it really is. We can only take our stand on the unity of the whole system, in which everything that claims to be a fact or a truth must find a place. Thus the idea that there are certain intuitions or perceptions which we can take for granted as *prior* to, and above all criticism, and which remain, in all the discourse of reason, as the fixed and immoveable basis of the whole edifice of science, involves a fundamental mistake. Indeed, the activities of the intuitive and the discursive reason can never be separated without making the former 'blind,' and the latter 'empty.' We always presuppose the unity of the whole in every determination of the parts in distinction from, and in relation to each other: and no element of the whole can be presented apart from the process whereby we distinguish and relate it within that whole. (We are thus, throughout all our intellectual life, advancing from a confused, imperfectly differentiated, and there-

fore imperfectly integrated, experience, towards an organic system of knowledge, in which justice shall be done to all the differences and oppositions of appearances, without sacrifice of their essential unity. And it casts confusion upon the whole process, when we treat it as if it were confined to the work of building upon fixed foundations, which are given either in sensation or in thought, apart from any process at all. On the contrary, it cannot be adequately represented except as an evolution, in which it is only the last product that shows distinctly the meaning of the germ out of which it sprang.

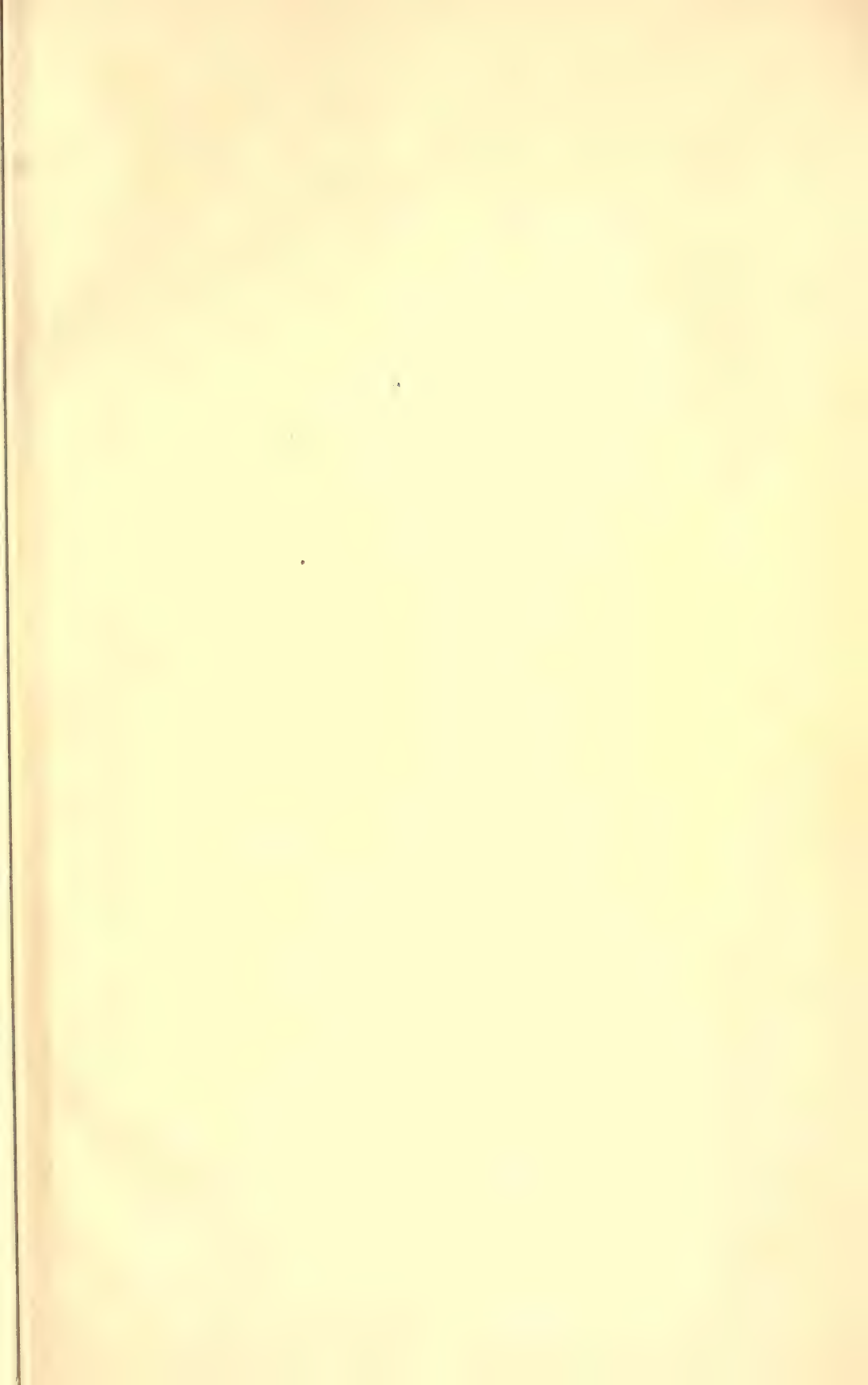
The view that has just been stated contains, I think, the essentials of that conception of knowledge which has been maintained by the greatest representatives of modern idealism; and it is obvious that it has no special kindred with the philosophy of Berkeley, and, from that point of view, is no less realistic than it is idealistic. At the same time, it may be acknowledged that in the process of working towards this result and, especially, in seeking to reply to those who treated knowledge as something given to the mind from without, idealists have sometimes dwelt too exclusively on the subjective aspect of knowledge. This was the case, as we have seen, with Kant, and it is apt to be the case with those who go back to Kant and take their start from him. We may add that it is apt to *seem* to be the case with such writers, even when it is not really so. Thus the views of T. H. Green are often misunderstood by those who do not recognize how much his language is coloured by opposition to authors like John Stuart Mill, whose philosophy was in the ascendant when Green began to write, but whose views are no longer so prominent in the mind of this generation of philosophers as they were then. Hence difficulty is apt to be caused by Green's constant insistence on the constructive activity of the mind in knowledge, carried, as it necessarily is, to the point of denying that any element of truth can be given to the mind apart from such activity. Such a doctrine seems to many to involve a denial of the objectivity of knowledge, and it has even provoked in some a reaction against all idealism, and a tendency to fall back upon 'the given' in the sense of naïve realism, i. e. upon the idea that at least the basis of experience is presented to consciousness without any activity of its own. And even the most conclusive demonstrations that it is impossible to detect any such *pure datum* have failed of their effect, because of a lurking suspicion that the reality of the objects of consciousness was being undermined. When Disraeli on one occasion was questioned as to the political platform on which he stood for election to a seat in parliament, he answered that he 'stood

upon his head.' But if that is a sufficient basis in politics, it can hardly be admitted to be so in the theory of knowledge. And when an idealist speaks of 'the judgement by which we sustain the world,' however adequate may be his explanation of such language, it is apt to excite a suspicion that his theories, if they were completely carried out, would lead to the individual being regarded as his own universe and his own God. This suspicion, perhaps as much as any other reason, is what drives many to accept some *via media*, in which the subject and the object are represented as in some way acting and reacting on each other—some such view as is implied in the metaphor of 'impression by,' or 'contact with' reality, and to substitute it for an organic conception of the relations between the mind and its object. Such a suspicion the idealist is bound to remove, if he expects his theories to be accepted; yet he must do so, of course, without compromising his fundamental conception of the relativity of the intelligible world to the intelligence.

Now, so far as this difficulty arises out of the Berkeleyian theory that the mind has primarily to do only with its own ideas, it may be met by the considerations already suggested. (As the consciousness of the self is correlative with the consciousness of the not-self, no conception of either can be satisfactory which does not recognize a principle of unity, which manifests itself in both, which underlies all their difference and opposition, and which must, therefore, be regarded as capable of reconciling them.) When, therefore, we speak of the object as manifesting itself in, and to the subject, determining his perceptions, thoughts and desires, and when, on the other hand, we speak of the subject as constructing his world in knowledge, and making it in action the means of his own self-realization, we are using language that represents two aspects of the truth, which are apparently opposed, but each of which has a relative validity; and it is important that we should not allow either of these forms of expression to exclude the other. (To say that the mind goes beyond itself to become conscious of the world, or to say that the object goes beyond itself to awake consciousness of itself in us, are two extreme ways of putting the fact of knowledge, which have opposite merits and opposite defects.) And, in like manner, in regard to our practical life, to say that we are always determined by objects, or to say we are always determined by ourselves, is to utter half-truths. Neither of these statements is quite adequate; nor can we reach the whole truth merely by putting them together, and saying that we are partly determined from without and partly from within. For, if we accepted this reciprocal determination of

subject and object as our final account of the matter, we should be left with a mechanical conception of action and reaction between two things which are external to each other, and we should be driven to deny that there is any unity which transcends the difference and manifests itself in it. Yet that, as I have attempted to show, is just the idea we have to admit, so soon as we realize that we can have no consciousness of the difference and relation of the two terms except on the basis of such a unity. We always presuppose the unity of consciousness in all our experience, inner and outer; but dualism seems natural to us because in our ordinary modes of thought we only *presuppose* it, and do not specially attend to it or reflect upon it. Our eyes are directed from the unity we tacitly assume to the differences we openly assert. (Yet the whole problem of our lives, the problem of practice no less than the problem of the theory, is made insoluble if we begin by assuming the absoluteness of the difference between the self and the not-self, and only then ask how are we to mediate between them.) If this were really the question, it could not be answered; but neither could it ever have arisen for us as a question at all. If, therefore, any one bases his theory on a presupposed dualism of subject and object, we may fairly ask how he comes to believe in it: (and this is a question which he cannot answer at all without treating the difference as a relative one.) But if it be so, the common notion that the Absolute, the ultimate reality, the Divine, or by whatever name we choose to name it, is a far-off something, a *Jenseits* or transcendental 'thing in itself,' involves a fundamental mistake. And it is no less a mistake to suppose, with Mr. Spencer, that it is a mere indeterminate basis of consciousness, of which we can say nothing except that it is. (It must be regarded as a principle of unity which is present in all things and beings, and from which they, in their utmost possible independence, cannot be separated.) It must be conceived, in short, as that in which they 'live and move and have their being.' And in the case of conscious and self-conscious beings such as we are, this unity must show itself as the underlying principle of all their conscious life. It is, therefore, no metaphor or overstatement of religious feeling, when we say that the consciousness of it is the presupposition both of the consciousness of objects and of the consciousness of self, if only it be remembered that, just because it is *πρῶτον φύσει*, it is *ἕστατον ἡμῖν*, i. e. that it is the last thing which we make an object of our thought. On the other hand, though it be last in thought, yet it may be maintained that neither the consciousness of the objective world nor the consciousness of the inner life of the self can attain its highest and

truest form until this presupposition is distinctly realized, as it is in religion, and also, we may add, until it is made the direct object of reflexion, as it is in philosophy. The greatest task of philosophy, indeed, is just to consider how the constant presence of this unity modifies the contents both of the subjective and of the objective consciousness. How far and how this task can be achieved, I cannot at present consider ; but in any case it seems clear that neither the subject nor the object can be known for what it really is, until their reciprocal correlation is taken into account, and until this correlation is itself seen in the light of the unity which it presupposes.





May 12

Oxford
Printed by Horace Hart, at the University Press

11. C. 9/5/68

BD
161
C35

Caird, Edward
Idealism and the theo
knowledge

PLEASE DO NOT REMOVE
CARDS OR SLIPS FROM THIS POCKET

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO LIBRARY

